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REAGAN TO PROPOSE BATTLESHIPS' RETURN

Budget to Seek Larger Navy Fleet
to Counter Moves by Soviet

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 27 — The Reagan Administration plans to request funds to reactivate two World War II battleships as soon as possible and possibly two more later when it submits a new military budget totaling nearly \$223 billion to Congress next Wednesday, Pentagon and Congressional officials disclosed today.

The Administration, those officials said, has decided to build a much larger fleet than previously planned. The budget request will be the first tangible evidence of the course it has set to counter what a senior naval intelligence officer has described in Congressional testimony as "unbelievably ambitious" Soviet program of naval construction.

The revised budget, which has grown by \$3 billion in recent weeks, would include about \$9 billion more for the Navy to buy new ships and aircraft. That would be about 40 percent more than the Carter Administration requested for naval procurement. The new military budget, on which finishing touches are still being applied, also calls for funds to begin construction of a new class of nuclear-powered battle cruisers that would be fitted with the Aegis system of radar and computer-controlled weapons for fleet defense.

In addition, the naval budget will request money for a fifth nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, for the reactivation of a World War II carrier, and for 75 more aircraft than the 121 that President Carter requested in his final budget.

Other funds would go for an additional smaller cruiser with the Aegis system, a new amphibious ship, another attack submarine and lesser purchases to bring the total procurement budget to \$30 billion.

The Reagan military budget is scheduled to go to Capitol Hill a week before the full budget presentation on March 10. That is because John Tower, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has been eager to move a bill through the committee and the Senate as quickly as possible.

Congressional officials said that Mr. Tower, a Texas Republican, wanted the military authorization bill voted before the Senate was caught up in debate over Mr. Reagan's proposals for budget and tax cuts, which might turn attention to the swiftly rising military budget.

There are currently no battleships in commission in any navy in the world. In the United States Navy, the battleship was supplanted as the capital ship of the fleet by the aircraft carrier after the Korean War. Battleships became vulnerable with the advent of air power and then missiles. However, the Reagan Administration's concept is to use the battleship in a supporting role rather than as the main striking force of the fleet.

The first battleship that the Administration proposes to reactivate would be the 45,000-ton New Jersey, which was commissioned in 1943, brought back into service for the Korean War and again for the Vietnam War.

The battleship, now laid up in Bremerton, Wash., is expected to take two and a half years to be brought back into commission. The proposed budget calls for \$92 million to be spent in the current fiscal year and \$162 million in the fiscal year 1982, which begins next October.

The second ship would be the Iowa, first commissioned in 1943 and brought back in the Korean War. She is laid up in Philadelphia and would cost more, about \$500 million, and take longer to bring back into commission because she has been out longer.

Study Is Planned

The officials said that funds would be requested to study the feasibility of reactivating the Missouri, on which the surrender of Japan took place, and the Wisconsin. The Missouri is mothballed in Bremerton, and the Wisconsin is in Philadelphia. Naval officers said that the Navy wanted the ships back, although not at the price of postponing new construction to bring heavy firepower to bear in a relatively short time. The Marine Corps is particularly eager to have them back to provide bombardment for amphibious assaults.

The plan calls for retaining each ship's three turrets of three 16-inch guns that can hurl a round more than 20 miles. The conversion would include modifying the boilers to shift from heavy bunker oil to more efficient distillate fuel, adding surface-to-surface and cruise missiles, and

installing modern radars and weapons controls.

The main problem would be to provide personnel for the ships, each of which would require 1,600 to 1,800 men. The Navy already has a shortage of 20,000 petty officers, the skilled personnel who drive the ships, operate the machinery and keep everything in repair.

The new cruiser to be proposed would be similar to the four Virginia-class ships of 10,000 tons each that are armed with guided missiles. But it would also have the Aegis system of sophisticated sensors and weapons controls that is currently planned for 6,000-ton cruisers.

The Reagan naval budget appeared to be in response to the pleas of admirals that the Soviet Union has taken long strides toward becoming a strong naval power. An official assessment of that came yesterday when Rear Adm. Sumner Shapiro described Soviet naval construction as "unbelievably ambitious."

Admiral Shapiro, the Director of Naval Intelligence, said that the Soviet Navy has embarked upon an aircraft carrier program of major proportions. He said that "the Soviets are well along in the planning for a larger, nuclear-powered aircraft carrier much like our own."